

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

International Trade Administration

Guidelines for Ensuring and Maximizing the Quality, Objectivity, Utility, and Integrity of Disseminated Information

AGENCY: Department of Commerce

OPERATING UNIT: International Trade Administration

ACTION: Notice; Request for comment.

SUMMARY: Section 515 of Public Law 106-554, the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001, directs the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to issue government-wide guidelines that “provide policy and procedural guidance to Federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information (including statistical information) disseminated by Federal agencies.” In addition, Section 515 requires that agencies subject to the OMB guidelines must establish “administrative mechanisms allowing affected persons to seek and obtain correction of information that does not comply with [the OMB guidelines].” The OMB final guidelines were published in the Federal Register on February 22, 2002. Those guidelines direct that agencies publish for public comment their draft guidelines. As such, the International Trade Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce is requesting public comment on the following guidelines, information quality standards, and administrative correction mechanism.

DATES: Comments are due by the close of business June 30, 2002.

ADDRESSES: Comments should be sent to Mary Ann McFate, Director of the Office of Organization and Management Support, HCHB Room 4001, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, DC 20230. Send e-mail to infoquality@ita.doc.gov.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

The International Trade Administration (ITA) furthers the international economic interests of the United States by improving the environment for U.S. foreign trade, assisting U.S. firms to realize their export potential in global markets, and protecting domestic companies from the effects of foreign unfair trading practices. ITA works closely with other Commerce operating units, the Office of the United States Trade Representative and other U.S. Government trade agencies to develop and implement trade policies and programs that serve the commercial interests of U.S. firms. An important element of these responsibilities is the dissemination of statistics and other information to private sector entities, academia and other governmental bodies.

ITA programs and activities support Department of Commerce Strategic Planning Goal 1: *Provide the information and the framework to enable the economy to operate efficiently and equitably.* With regard to Objective 1.1, *Provide the infrastructure to enable the participation of all Americans in the new economy*, ITA assists the export growth of small and medium-sized businesses, enforces U.S. trade laws and trade agreements, monitors and maintains trading relationships with established markets, promotes new business in emerging markets (e.g., China), and improves access to overseas markets by identifying and pressing for the removal of trade barriers. ITA contributes to Objective 1.2, *Promote responsible economic growth and trade while protecting U.S. security*, by improving access to foreign markets through trade agreement compliance enforcement and negotiating foreign observance of laws governing dumping and subsidies. Finally, ITA contributes to Objective 1.3, *Support the effective decision-making of policymakers, businesses, and the American public*, by compiling and disseminating trade and related economic data originating in the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Economic Analysis, other U.S. Government agencies, foreign governments, and international organizations in an effort to better monitor and analyze trade flows.

In support of these programs and activities, ITA disseminates to the public a broad range of information. This information can be broken down into three major categories: (1) trade and related data, all of which are summaries or aggregations of statistics from other sources – primarily from U.S. and foreign governments and international organizations; (2) foreign and domestic market assessments, including market research conducted abroad and economic analyses on a national geographic and industry sector basis; and (3) general descriptive commercial and trade policy information. While the vast majority of information disseminated by ITA originates from other sources, the agency augments the value of the data by, inter alia, aggregating very detailed statistics, analyzing and interpreting data trends and their economic implications, summarizing and organizing trade policy and commercial information, and presenting graphical representations of statistical material.

TRADE & RELATED DATA

The International Trade Administration disseminates a wide variety of trade and related international economic data that originate primarily from other sources. These include such USG government sources as the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Economic Analysis in Commerce, the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the Department of Labor, the Departments of Agriculture, Energy and Interior, and the Federal Reserve System. Other major sources include such international organizations as the International Monetary Fund, the United Nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the World Bank and its affiliates. Foreign government entities also serve as important original sources. Finally, private sector organizations also provide relevant data.

The disseminated data are available in two primary forms: 1) the same form as produced by the originating entities; and 2) aggregations or other transformations of the detailed data produced by the originating entities.

Utility

Utility refers to the usefulness of the information to its intended users. User groups include private and public sector trade analysts and policy-makers, private sector marketing specialists, the media and the academic community. Efforts to ensure information utility involve encouraging users to provide feedback about the content of disseminated information, utilizing the insights of program managers and professional staff in anticipating the evolving needs of end users, and adopting selected recommendations of funding entities and professional program review units.

Consistent with resource availability, ITA endeavors to compile and release statistics and other information in a timely manner. ITA attempts to disseminate information in a manner that is understandable to a broad range of users. And ITA continually strives to make improvements that meet customer expectations for ease of access, prompt turnaround times, simple interface mechanisms, and the utilization of emerging technologies.

Objectivity

Objectivity refers to the presentation of information that is accurate, reliable, unbiased, clear and complete. Objectivity is achieved by using reliable data sources and sound analytic techniques and by employing highly qualified personnel to prepare and carefully review information products.

ITA is committed to the use of the best data sources available, the use of

proven techniques to aggregate/modify the basic data, procedures to ensure effective review of information before its dissemination, data descriptions and interpretive materials as appropriate, and ongoing efforts to incorporate revisions and needed corrections as identified.

Integrity

Integrity refers to the protection of the information so that the material disseminated is unaltered between the time it received final approval and the time it is distributed. It also refers to the appropriate timing of the release of the information – e.g., that sensitive information is not disseminated prior to its authorized release date and time.

ITA exercises due diligence in ensuring that the data and other information disseminated reflects the content prepared by ITA analysts and its agents and approved by ITA supervisors. Printed materials are reviewed before they are approved for general distribution and information for electronic distribution is reviewed for accuracy before it is linked to official ITA web sites.

Electronic system integrity controls, both for internal intranet systems and publicly-accessible internet systems, protect information from corruption and unauthorized modification, monitor access to identify attempts to “break into” the systems, and are continually updated to thwart emerging techniques for unauthorized access. System access controls limit information access to those individuals authorized to process various types of information. Access rights are established and maintained for individuals on a need-to-know basis. Access controls also prohibit release of information prior to its authorized release date and time.

FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC MARKET ASSESSMENTS

The International Trade Administration disseminates a variety of materials that describe, analyze and assess the implications of foreign and domestic economic and commercial developments for U.S. exporters and other business entities. These materials include the analysis of U.S. foreign trade developments, economic and business conditions in foreign markets and the domestic economy, foreign market research on an industry sector basis, and the economic and commercial implications for U.S. businesses of trade policy initiatives and commercial practices.

The foreign and domestic market assessments are characterized by the selective use of economic data from both official and private sector sources, the analysis of overall and sector specific market trends abroad and in the United States, projections and estimates of future market developments and effects of laws, regulations and commercial practices on the environment for U.S. businesses abroad and in the United States. These markets assessments are conducted both by ITA analysts and foreign and domestic business entities under contract to ITA.

Utility

Utility refers to the usefulness of the information to its intended users. User groups include the marketing departments and other individuals/groups in private firms, foreign market analysts, trade analysts, the media and the academic community. Efforts to ensure information utility involve encouraging users to provide feedback about the content of disseminated information, utilizing the insights of program managers and professional staff in anticipating the evolving needs of end users, and adopting as appropriate selected recommendations of funding entities and professional review units.

ITA endeavors to conduct market research and other market assessments that benefit a broad range of U.S. firms, especially smaller companies and those with limited export experience, and are likely to have the potential to make significant contributions to U.S. export performance and the general commercial vitality of U.S. businesses. These analyses are also designed to assist public and private sector trade officials identify foreign markets and U.S. industry sectors that USG trade policy initiatives and programs can benefit most.

Objectivity

Objectivity refers to the presentation of information that is accurate, reliable, unbiased, clear and complete. Objectivity is achieved by using reliable data sources and sound analytic techniques and by employing highly qualified personnel to prepare and carefully review information products.

ITA is committed to the use of the best available data sources and the use of proven techniques to analyze the data, determine the relative importance of the various data, assess the implications of the data for U.S. businesses and commercial interests, and present informed judgments of the future prospects for U.S. firms in foreign and domestic markets. Efforts are made to ensure that internally generated market assessments are sound and represent the best available professional judgments of ITA staff. For market assessments contracted out to foreign and domestic entities, ITA makes every effort to ensure the best contractor is identified consistent with available resources, and the resultant products are reviewed by relevant ITA professionals and supervisors before they are disseminated to the public.

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GENERAL COMMERCIAL AND TRADE POLICY INFORMATION

The International Trade Administration disseminates a broad range of general commercial information, primarily relating to foreign markets, and a comprehensive body of U.S. and foreign information dealing with the implementation of trade laws and related practices. Commercial information includes foreign business practices, trade leads, and potential agents, distributors and other business partners abroad. The primary purpose of this information is to assist U.S. exporters and potential exporters realize their overseas business potential. Information dealing with trade laws and regulations includes foreign and domestic documentation requirements, tariff rates, shipping options and regulations, health and safety standards, and trade agreement and trade law compliance issues.

Utility

Utility refers to the usefulness of the information to its intended users. The broad range of user groups for these types of information include U.S. firms involved in exporting or who are considering exporting, legal services entities, federal, state and local government officials, the media and academia. Efforts to ensure information utility involve encouraging users to provide feedback about the content of disseminated information, utilizing the insights of program managers and professional staff in anticipating the evolving needs of end users, and adopting as appropriate selected recommendations of funding entities and professional review units.

ITA endeavors to provide information that will assist U.S. firms to make enlightened decisions about exporting in general and export marketing strategies and pursuing specific export opportunities in particular. It is also designed to help U.S. firms and other related business entities understand the “nuts and bolts” of exporting. The information is also designed to provide a convenient repository of material relating trade agreements and trade law and related implementation issues.

Objectivity

Objectivity refers to the presentation of information that is accurate, reliable, unbiased, clear and complete. Objectivity relating to this category of information is achieved by using reliable information sources and by employing highly qualified personnel to prepare and carefully review information products.

ITA makes consistent efforts to ensure that information disseminated is up-to-date and accurate. Some of the material comes from other sources

and is reproduced in its entirety. Other material is produced in summary form from original sources. And some material is developed internally using both external and internal sources. All materials are reviewed by supervisors/senior staff before being released to the public.

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**INTERNATIONAL TRADE ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES TO
CORRECT INFORMATION THAT DOES NOT COMPLY WITH ITA SECTION 515
INFORMATION QUALITY GUIDELINES**

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued government-wide guidelines at 67 FR 8452-8460 (February 22, 2002) that provide policy and procedural guidance to Federal agencies for ensuring and maximizing the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information they disseminate. Agencies are required to issue their own implementing guidelines, including corrections procedures, and to make the guidelines available on individual agency web sites. In accord with Public Law 106-554, "affected persons" (individuals who may benefit or be harmed by the disseminated information) may see correction of information maintained and disseminated by Federal agencies if such information does not comply with quality guidelines issued by OMB or the agency. To seek a correction of information maintained or disseminated by the International Trade Administration, the affected person should follow the procedures set out below. Except as specifically modified herein, the Model Administrative Mechanism for Requesting Correction of Information Disseminated to the Public issued by the Department of Commerce is hereby incorporated in its entirety.

International Trade Administration Contacts

The International Trade Administration has many different organizational units that collect, compile and disseminate a broad range of statistical and other information. Requests for clarification/correction of information by affected persons initially should be directed to the individual, office or other unit who/which is identified as the contact for the material in question, whether it is hard copy or electronic files.

If the individual/unit contact cannot be identified, please contact ITA's Director of the Office of Organization and Management Support (Mary Ann McFate) at infoquality@ita.doc.gov. The phone number is (202) 482-5436. The fax number is (202) 482-1584. The mailing address is Director, Office of Organization and Management Support (Mary Ann McFate), HCHB 4001, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C. 20230. The correction request will be forwarded to the appropriate individual/unit, and the affected party will be contacted.

If an affected party is unable to resolve his/her information issues informally with the originating individual/unit, the affected party can request a formal evaluation of his/her complaint by directing written or electronic correspondence to ITA's Director of the Office of Organization and Management Support. This formal correction request must include the requestor's name, mailing address, telephone number, fax number (if any), e-mail address (if any), and organizational affiliation (if any). The complaint must include the name of the report, data set, or product and a detailed description of the information that the affected party wishes to correct. The complaint should include specific recommendations for how and why the information should be corrected. Requests for correction that are specific and provide evidence to support the need for correction are likely to be more persuasive than requests for correction that are general and unfocused. Supporting documentary evidence, such as comparable data or other

information on the same topic, will help ITA evaluate the merits of the request.

If the request states a claim, based on the explanation and evidence submitted, the originating office will review the information challenged, the processes that were used to prepare and disseminate it, and its conformity with the ITA Information Quality Guidelines. At the completion of the review, the originating office will determine whether a correction is warranted and, if so, what action to take given available resources. Any corrective action, and the time frame for taking such action, will be determined based on the nature and timeliness of the information involved and such factors as the significance of the error on the use of the information, the magnitude of the error, and the cost of making the correction. Corrective actions will vary from immediate correction or replacement of information on the ITA web site (<http://www.ita.doc.gov>) to the revision of subsequent issues of recurring products, to the issuance of errata for printed materials.

Timing

ITA, in the form of a written or electronic letter signed by an appropriate official of the originating office, will inform the affected party of its decision within 60 days of receiving the complaint. (If ITA is unable to complete its review in the 60-day period, the originating office will notify the affected party that the review is still underway, and will provide an expected completion date.) The response will explain the process that ITA followed in its review of the complaint, and the findings of the review. If ITA determines corrective action is warranted, the response will include a progress report, and a subsequent followup will be sent when the corrective action is completed. If ITA determines that corrective action is not warranted, ITA will explain that a correction will not be made, and why.

Appeals

If an affected party wishes to appeal the ITA response, he/she should provide a written justification supporting the appeal that addresses as specifically as possible the reasons that the party disagrees with ITA's rationale for rejecting the initial correction request. The appeal should be sent within 30 calendar days of the review decision to the Under Secretary for International Trade (Grant D. Aldonas), c/o ITA Secretariat, Attn: Section 515 Appeal, HCHB 3823, U.S. Department of Commerce, Washington, D.C. 20230.

A review of the appeal by the Under Secretary or his/her designee(s) will be completed within 30 days and the affected party will be notified in writing of the decision by the Under Secretary or his/her designee regarding the appeal. (Should the appeal decision take longer than 30 days, ITA will notify the affected party when the decision is expected.) If the appeal is upheld, the letter will state that corrective action is warranted, and the nature and timing of the corrective action. A subsequent letter will be sent when the corrective action is completed. If the appeal is denied, the letter will include a rationale for the denial.